



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **ICE ARRESTS 10 ON DRUG-SMUGGLING, MONEY-LAUNDERING CHARGES**

*Law enforcement officers have seized more than \$1.6 million and 100 kilograms of cocaine*

DALLAS—With today's unsealing of two federal grand jury indictments, 10 people were arrested on drug smuggling, money laundering and other charges by a special law enforcement operation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents.

A squad of agents with the North Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (NT/HIDTA) initiative made the arrests after the indictments totaling four counts were unsealed today by U.S. Attorney Matthew D. Orwig, Eastern District of Texas. The federal grand jury returned these indictments March 10, which were not unsealed until today.

"Today's arrests are the culmination of an 18-month international drug-smuggling and money-laundering investigation, which involved members of an international drug cartel based in Nuevo Leon and Piedras Negras, Mexico," said Kenneth W. Cates, special agent-in-charge of the ICE Dallas Office of Investigations. "Contraband seized from this criminal organization so far includes: \$1,678,040 in U.S. currency, 194 kilograms of cocaine, and seven kilograms of methamphetamine. This entire organization is believed responsible for importing and distributing more than 100 kilograms of cocaine per week, and large scale smuggling of bulk U.S. currency into Mexico."

Those arrested so far under "Operation Black Eagle" include: Rodolfo Leal-Rodriguez, 44; Jose Manuel Garcia, 35; Jose Escalante, 30; Karla Flores-Escalante, 31; Jose Diaz-Lopez, 22; Jose Villalon, 38; Peter Escobedo, 25; Maria Flores, 30; Imelda Flores, 26; and Francisco Lopez-Villareal, 31. The four-count indictment charges include: possession with intent to distribute cocaine, money laundering, conspiracy, and smuggling bulk cash out of the United States.

The Dallas investigation was a joint drug smuggling investigation conducted by law enforcement agencies under the HIDTA umbrella. Participating agencies include: the FBI, Dallas County Sheriff's Office, Arlington Police Department, Fort Worth Police Department, Tarrant County Sheriff's Department, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

The Dallas investigation identified other organization members based in San Antonio, which resulted in a subsequent ICE investigation. This morning, the ICE San Antonio Office of Investigations also culminated its investigation by arresting eight organization members.

“A drug-smuggling and money-laundering operation of this magnitude requires a sophisticated criminal network,” said Cates. “A law enforcement network like our North Texas HIDTA squad was needed to thoroughly investigate every aspect of this illegal operation and put an end to it.”

According to Cates, this investigation is ongoing, and additional arrests and seizures are anticipated.

### **#ICE#**

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities*